

STATEMENT OF WILLIAM D. SHADDOX, ACTING ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, PARK PLANNING, FACILITIES, AND LANDS, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, FORESTS, AND PUBLIC LANDS OF THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES REGARDING H.R. 1266, THE BUTTERFIELD OVERLAND TRAIL STUDY ACT.

July 19, 2007

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you to provide the Department of the Interior's views on H.R. 1266, a bill to authorize a resource study along the "Ox Bow Route" of the Butterfield Overland Trail.

The Department supports enactment of H.R. 1266 with amendments that are described later in this statement. However, we believe that priority should be given to the 37 previously authorized studies for potential units of the National Park System, potential new National Heritage Areas, and potential additions to the National Trails System and National Wild and Scenic River System that have not yet been transmitted to the Congress.

H.R. 1266 authorizes a resource study to examine the Ox Bow Route of the Butterfield Overland Trail to evaluate a range of options to preserve the trail's history, interpret the stories associated with it, and protect resources key to its future appreciation by the public. One alternative may be to add the trail to the National Trails System, which would require subsequent Congressional action. The bill outlines a variety of study objectives as well as requirements designed to protect private property rights of landowners along the route.

The Butterfield Overland Mail Route was the scene of biweekly stage coach and mail service between St. Louis, Missouri, and Memphis, Tennessee, to San Francisco, California between 1858 and 1861. Like the Pony Express farther north, this business venture, closely tied to U.S. Government mail contracts, ceased functioning at the outbreak of the Civil War. The two eastern ends of the Ox Bow Route joined at Fort Smith, Arkansas, crossed Texas to El Paso, came through Fort Yuma (in what is now Arizona), and proceeded up the California coast to San Francisco. This 2,812 mile route took 22 to 25 days to complete by four-horse coach, costing passengers \$200 for the full one-way fare. Started by John Butterfield in 1858, the business was taken over by Wells, Fargo and Company in 1860 before ceasing operations a year later. It employed over 800 men, had 139 relay stations or frontier forts, used 1,800 head of stock, and required the use of 250 Concord Overland stagecoaches. In its heyday, the Butterfield Overland Stage Company was the largest overland stage company with the most relay stations and frontier forts then operating in the United States.

When the category of “national historic trail” was first added to the National Trails System in 1978, the Department of the Interior developed a file of potential historic trails, including the Butterfield Overland Mail Route. Never developed into a study document, this file lists 39 trail-related resources across Texas, including 17 towns and cities and a variety of state and national park areas. To our knowledge, there has not been a Federal study that fully examined trail-related sites or remnant trail segments in all eight of the states crossed by the Ox Bow Route.

H.R. 1266 would enable the study team to look at all feasible alternatives for preserving and interpreting resources associated with the Ox Bow Route. These alternatives could potentially

include a national historic trail, a national heritage corridor, a multi-state scenic byway, or other options. However, if one of the alternatives is a recommendation for addition to the National Trails System, we believe that part of the feasibility study should meet all the study requirements of the National Trails System Act as outlined in 16 USC 1244(b). We suggest amending the bill to specify this requirement. We also recommend clarifying some of the provisions in Section 2(b), which lists the study objectives, and making a technical amendment to Section 3. We would be happy to work with the bill's sponsor and the committee on these amendments.

We estimate the cost of this study to range from \$200,000 to \$400,000, based on similar types of studies conducted in recent years.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my prepared statement. I would be happy to answer any questions that you or other committee members may have regarding this bill.